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SUBJECT: CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS LAUNCH DISCUSSION OF NEW BASIC  
PROGRAM

Classified By: Acting Political Counselor John Lister. Reason: 1.4(b)  
and (d)

Summary

1. (U) Under the slogan "New Justice Through More Freedom," Chancellor Merkel hosted a mini-convention of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) on February 21 to launch the development of a new Basic Program for the party. Merkel emphasized the many challenges not addressed in the 1994 Basic Program (e.g., integration, globalization, and global terrorism) and the need to take a new look at issues such as education and family support. At the convention, also billed as a "Values Congress," there were also repeated references to the Christian values that form the basis of the "leading culture" ("Leitkultur"), an expression mistrusted on the left and likely to fuel further resentment among German Muslims. The party hopes that the development of a new Basic Program will help distinguish the party from the SPD as well as develop a common internal position on issues where party leaders' views diverge. The CDU hopes to complete the new program by the end of 2007. At this stage, we see no issues on the horizon likely to badly divide the party or slow development of the new program. End Summary

New General-Secretary

2. (U) The first order of business was the confirmation in office of the new CDU General-Secretary, Ronald Pofalla, to which 76 of the 79 delegates (nearly all nationally prominent party leaders) agreed. Pofalla replaced former Volker Kauder. In his speech, Pofalla stressed that he intended to promote both the CDU as the party of the center and the centrality of cutting unemployment in the party's strategy. Turning to the theme of the day, he suggested that the SPD did not share the Christian values of the CDU and that this had a practical effect in politics. The SPD, he said, reduced freedom to a matter of state-administered socio-economic justice. The CDU believed that justice required reducing the role of the state because freedom also entailed facilitating individual and national achievement.

Values Commissioner Boehr

3. (U) Christoph Boehr, the CDU's candidate for Minister-President in Rhineland-Palatinate has also been designated Chairman of the CDU's "Values Commission," delivered an address in which he maintained the identity of Christian values with European ones and that these formed the basis of Germany's "Leitkultur" or "leading culture." This culture was based on the inviolable dignity of the individual, a value which, Boehr said, not all other religions share. Boehr returned to this general point

repeatedly. On a more political level, he argued that social justice now was not a question of distribution of material benefits, but of providing equal developmental opportunities to all. On the margins, Poloff questioned a party contact about the thinly veiled criticism of Islam and Muslim culture. This contact did not deny Poloff's interpretation, and placed Boehr's speech firmly in the context of Boehr's election campaign.

Chancellor Merkel

14. (U) The Chancellor's speech focused on specific political issues which, in her view, needed to be evaluated or re-visited in the light of the specific challenges of a globalized world, albeit on the basis of long-standing values. Responding to the rise of political Islam and of terrorism were two challenges the party had not addressed in 1994. The party also must re-visit the reasons for its support for further deepening of the EU: simply asserting that the EU had made Europe peaceful was no longer sufficient. The bulk of her speech, however, was focused on domestic economic and social concerns. She placed the development of the individual and of his/her right to participate in society at the center of politics. It was not the task of politics, she pointedly said, to make everyone equal. As examples of policies that would implement this view, she spoke of the need for strong protection of intellectual property rights; lowering barriers to hiring the unemployed; increased competition - and not just in the economy, but also in education and in German federalism; and reform of the tax system. Merkel rejected the idea of tension between freedom and social solidarity because, she argued, the Christian ethic taught that the former must be used to further the latter.

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Comment

15. (C) The CDU and SPD are now both engaged in writing new programs, and largely for the same reason: to ensure/restore party unity and to ensure the party's distinct identity in the public. Contacts in both parties acknowledge that Basic Programs have little direct electoral value, but they will lay the groundwork for what both parties acknowledge will be a head-to-head campaign in 2009 (if not sooner). In the meantime, despite the occasional pointed barbs, Post does not see the CDU's project as a danger to the functioning or stability of the coalition. End Comment.  
TIMKEN JR